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Transforming Library Culture with a Digital Accessibility Team

Vacek, Rachel; Howell, Ben

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Transforming Library Culture with a Digital Accessibility Team

Rachel Vacek

Head, Design & Discovery
University of Michigan
@vacekrae

Ben Howell

User Experience & Accessibility Specialist
University of Michigan
@BenHowellA11y

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Hello! I'm Rachel Vacek, Head of Design & Discovery and <Ben introduces himself>. We both work in Library IT at the University of Michigan Library, and we're here today to talk to you about transforming your library's culture with a digital accessibility team.

How can digital accessibility transform a library?

Rachel - 20 minutes

First let me begin by saying that the term “digital accessibility” has many facets:

- Policy creation around service
- Product and platform procurement or development
- Empowering and training staff across the organization to recognize digital accessibility barriers
- Much more

Each library has a unique audience and organizational structure and culture. Today, Ben and I will share with you how digital accessibility is moving forward in our library and on our campus. We hope you'll find a few insights that will benefit you and your organization while you're on the road to a more accessible and inclusive library experience.

Presentation outline

- Brief history
- Challenges coordinating accessibility efforts
- Strategic investments
- Creation of the Digital Accessibility Team (DAT)
- Mission, expertise, and services
- Reflection on impact
- Next steps
- Takeaways

Here's our outline for today. I'll begin with:

- A brief history of accessibility work at our library
- I'll talk about the challenges in coordinating accessibility efforts
- Strategic investments and specific library positions dedicated to accessibility throughout the library

Once I've provided the background and helped set the context, Ben's going to dive into the Digital Accessibility Team and talk about

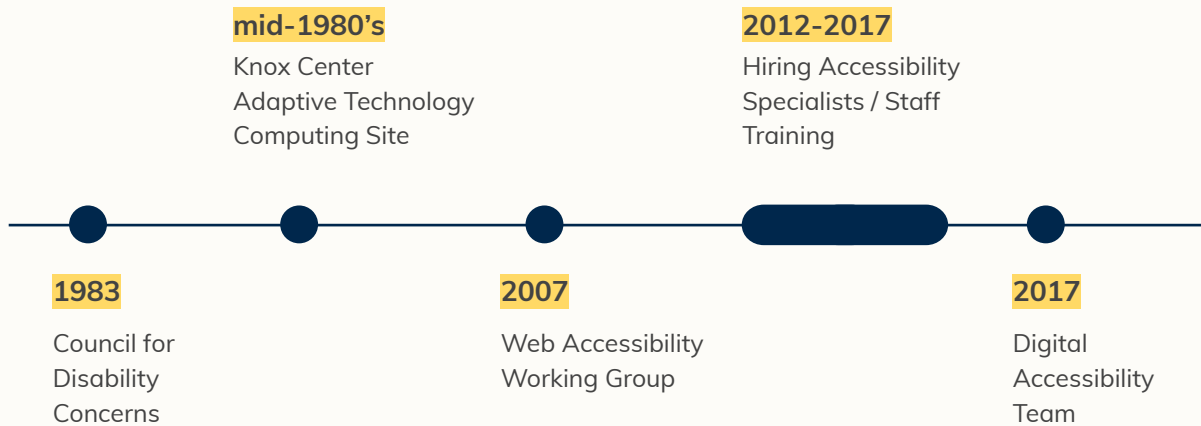
- How and why the Digital Accessibility Team was created
 - We'll often refer to it as "DAT" throughout the presentation.
- He'll go over DAT's mission, expertise, and services, and go more in depth in the services which include outreach, consultation and evaluation
- Ben will then share DAT's reflections after a year of being in existence. They've accomplished a lot, and there are many opportunities and directions to go in.
- Ben will talk about next steps in developing stronger, key partnerships with campus accessibility initiatives.

And finally, Ben and I will highlight the takeaways that we think will help you be more intentional in nurturing an inclusive and accessible culture in your organization.

Brief history

Let's begin with a brief history of accessibility efforts in the library and on campus. Knowing this context will help when Ben later talks about where our accessibility collaborations with campus are headed.

Accessibility at U-M and in the Library



The Council for Disability Concerns

- was formed in 1983 at the conclusion of the University of Michigan's observance of the International Year of Disabled Persons (IYTD), which was celebrated in 1982.
- charged to act in an advisory capacity regarding University programs and policies which affect people with disabilities.
- meets monthly (and have since 1983!!!) to address disability issues affecting the University of Michigan and also members of the community
- members represent a broad cross-section of the University including the Library
- chaired by Stephanie Rosen, Accessibility Specialist at the U-M Library

The Knox Center

- The James Edward Knox Center is named for Jim Knox, the first Director of the University of Michigan Adaptive Technology Computing Site.
- He became interested in computer accommodations in the mid-1980s when a blind student, A. Douglas Thompson, inquired why he had to pay fees each semester to use computer equipment that was inaccessible to him.
- Together, Jim and Doug established the Barrier-Free Computer User Group, which met regularly to learn about assistive technology options and advocate for improved accessibility.
- Jim established the adaptive technology computing site in the Shapiro Library where students, staff, and faculty with spinal cord injuries, visual and hearing impairments, dyslexia, carpal tunnel syndrome, and other disabilities have

- access to adaptive hardware, software and workstations.
- He even helped design special needs computer workstations... Countless students have credited him with their academic success.

Web Accessibility Working Group

- Established in 2007 with a goal to share learning about web accessibility topics and to develop a community of web accessibility practitioners on campus.
- By 2012, the group was meeting in Shapiro Library because “it’s central location on campus was accessible, easy to find, and easy to get to.”
- Scott Williams was hired as a campus-wide Web Accessibility Coordinator and he led this group from 2012-2016.
- Ben Howell led the group from 2016-2019. Early this year, he established a committee within the Working Group to lead the planning of the meetings and events.

Library strategic efforts

- From 2012-2017, the library hired several UX staff who have accessibility as part of title and or job responsibilities
- In early 2017, Library IT offered training from DeQue for project managers, designers, content managers, developers across several divisions in the Library.
- The Digital Accessibility Team was established in 2017.
 - Team is charged with members from 3 Library divisions who have experience with technical, organizational, content, publishing, and universal design aspects of accessibility.
 - Later that year, they developed evaluation, consultation, and outreach services to further accessibility work within the library
 - This group has come to serve as a leader for accessible design and development practices across campus. Ben will talk more about the work of this group, and what they are working on next, in a bit.

Challenges coordinating accessibility efforts

As you can see, there is a lot of history and dedication to making our campus and library services, spaces, and resources more accessible to everyone. Accessibility has been a value to this campus for many decades. Additionally, the library is heavily invested.

But coordinating all these accessibility groups across a large, decentralized campus can be complicated.

Challenges with coordination on campus

Campus is huge:

- Over 46,000 students
- Over 26,000 administrative, medical, and academic staff
- 13 undergraduate schools and colleges
- 18 graduate schools and colleges
- 3 hospitals, dozens of outpatient clinics and medical centers
- Nearly 500 library staff

Gratefully, many in the library, including Ben, are actively engaged with many of the campus groups dedicated to improving accessibility that I just talked about, including Council for Disability Concerns and the Web Accessibility Working Group.

However, Michigan is a huge place, and new services are coming and going regularly. Here are some numbers to help paint a picture. The University of Michigan has:

- Over 46,000 students
- Approximately 26,000 administrative, medical, and academic staff
- 13 undergraduate schools and colleges
- 18 graduate schools and colleges
- 3 hospitals, dozens of outpatient clinics and medical centers
- And almost 500 people just in our Ann Arbor campus libraries

Clear and effective communication across our campus can be very difficult. The reliance on personal relationships almost becomes essential. So coordinating *accessibility* efforts can be challenging, to say the least.

Challenges with coordination in the library

Diverse contexts

Library environments, in-person and online services, collections, content, and tools

Distributed procurement

Broad scope of resources procured across multiple departments in the library

Diverse content and platforms

Wide range of content produced; platforms, products, and resources created and maintained by library staff

In addition to having so many library staff, there are other challenges in coordinating accessibility efforts and initiatives.

People have diverse contexts

- We have multiple library environments, we offer in-person and online services, collections, content, and tools. Staff, as well as users, experience these things in different ways.

Distributed procurement

- We have thousands of print and electronic resources and multiple procurement methods. There's such a broad scope of resources that are procured across multiple departments in the library

Diverse content and platforms

- We have a wide range of content that we produce:
 - Numerous platforms running a wide array of web applications, repositories, collections, services, and they all have different tech stacks
 - These applications and resources are open source, home-grown, licensed, and maintained by library staff in multiple library divisions.

Accessibility shouldn't be ad hoc

- No accessibility policy on campus
- People try to be engaged based on good will
- It's unclear whether people have to comply, or what compliance looks like



Elephant, Amboseli Game Preserve, Kenya.
From the U-M Museum of Anthropological
Archaeology digital collection.
<http://quod.lib.umich.edu/a/anthro1ic/x-530/530>

But here's the elephant in the room. There is no central accessibility policy on campus. We've learned from talking with people across campus that many people generally try to be good accessibility advocates. They frequently come to the Web Accessibility Working Group meetings to learn more.

But having no overarching policy for our campus has really impacted people's overall awareness of the importance of making their resources and services more universally accessible.

It's been unclear to people whether or not they have to comply with the Web Content Accessibility Guidelines (WCAG). And without a policy and little training, it's also unclear what compliance looks like.

Basically, the campus has been taking a very ad hoc approach to accessibility. There was no grand vision, and no agreement on how to help get campus compliant.

People lean on the goodness of where it shows up. People often point to the accessibility champions on campus and say how they are doing really great work. But that's not compliance.

Strategic investments

Despite all these challenges, the campus, as well as the library, has invested in numerous strategic initiatives to help. I'll talk about a few of them here, and Ben will dive into some when he talks about next steps.

Campus plans for accessibility



U-M has a Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion Strategic Plan

Council for Disability Concerns has a Strategic Plan to increase awareness and education

Under the leadership of President Mark Schlissel, in fall 2015, the University of Michigan embarked upon a renewed commitment to diversity, equity and inclusion.

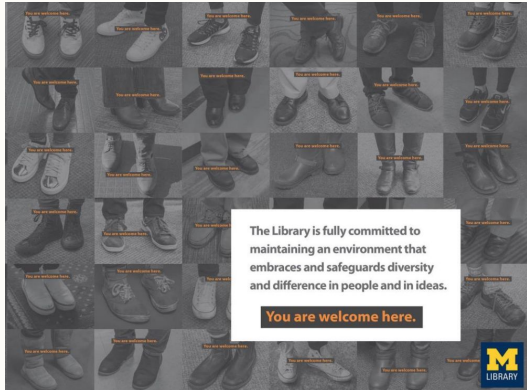
In 2016, campus established its DEI Strategic Plan. The implementation has seen significant progress, with new initiatives being incorporated into many aspects of the university's mission and operations.

Progress is documented each year in an annual Progress Report, and these reports capture more than 2,000 action items of the 51 plans developed by individual school, college, and campus units.

I also want to mention that although accessibility isn't emphasized in the title of the plan, it's definitely included within many of the initiatives within the connected plans across campus, including the library's.

And the Council for Disability Concerns has a strategic plan to increase awareness and education.

Library plans for accessibility



The U-M Library has a 5-year DEIA Strategic Plan focusing on:

- Recruitment, retention and development
- Education and scholarship
- Equity, inclusion, and accessibility
- Service and leadership

In the library we fully embrace, support and contribute to U-M's Diversity, Equity and Inclusion efforts, while at the same honoring and leveraging the library's unique DEIA history and perspective.

Finding and building ways to blend our organizational culture with broader university efforts has required us to adapt our organic, ad hoc approach to accessibility work into taking a more strategic approach. So we created a 5-year DEIA strategic plan.

Library positions with a focus on accessibility

Accessibility representation within 4 library divisions: Deans' Office, Learning and Teaching, Library IT, and Publishing

- **Jeff Witt**, Diversity and Inclusion Specialist
- **Stephanie Rosen**, Accessibility Specialist
- **Ben Howell**, User Experience & Accessibility Specialist
- **Bridget Burke**, Front-End Developer & Accessibility Specialist
- **Jon Earley**, Front-End Developer & Accessibility Specialist
- **Jon McGlone**, Front-End & User Interface Designer

As I mentioned when I went over the timeline, between 2012 and 2017 the library created multiple positions to help embed accessibility expertise and advocacy throughout the library.

There is accessibility representation within 4 library divisions: Deans' Office, Learning and Teaching, Library IT, and Publishing.

- Jeff Witt, Diversity and Inclusion Specialist
- Stephanie Rosen, Accessibility Specialist
- Ben Howell, User Experience & Accessibility Specialist
- Bridget Burke, Front-End Developer & Accessibility Specialist
- Jon Earley, Front-End Developer & Accessibility Specialist
- Jon McGlone, Front-End & User Interface Designer

Paving the way for the Digital Accessibility Team

Challenge:

With the creation of accessibility positions, implementation of tools, and training opportunities, what else was needed to help create a sustainable approach to ensuring digital accessibility compliance at scale?

Solution:

- Create a cross-divisional team that could offer digital accessibility services to project teams and individuals throughout the library
- Give the team a budget
- Encourage project teams and individuals in the library to consult with them

So as I mentioned, I'm in Library IT. I'm one of 5 department heads within the division. 3 of the 6 positions that had been created with a focus on accessibility are in my department. With the creation of all these new positions with a focus on web accessibility, with campus getting the Deque Comply accessibility scanning tool, with the training on web accessibility that Library IT coordinated and held for numerous people involved in digital projects across the library, we knew that we couldn't continue to sustain the success we've had so far in such an ad hoc approach.

These big pushes were all critical to getting buy-in and building trust throughout the organization. We were building up expertise, but we also needed a more sustainable strategy. We needed a solution that would be able to work more effectively at scale.

We also didn't have enough accessibility positions in Library IT for them to be on all the projects that we have going on at any one time in the division (which is usually about 40 or so projects). The solution seemed to be to take a team approach.

Now I'm going to turn it over to Ben who will take a deeper dive into the goals and work of the Digital Accessibility Team.

Creation of the Digital Accessibility Team (DAT)

Ben - 20 minutes

Now that Rachel has set the context, I'm going to talk more in depth about the creation of DAT, and who's involved.

Creating the Digital Accessibility Team (DAT)

Goal:

Coordinate digital accessibility consultation, evaluation and outreach services through a multidisciplinary team

Process:

- Created a charge and a basic plan
 - Mission, services, resources needed, members/expertise, communication strategy
- Incorporated strategic input/communication with library leadership
- Established regular meetings and office hours
- Started sandboxing evaluation, consultation and outreach services

Goal:

Coordinate digital accessibility consultation, evaluation and outreach services through a multidisciplinary team

Process:

- Our web accessibility specialist, Stephanie Rosen began a charge and Library leadership and future team members contributed, edited, and finalized the objectives and team members who would participate.
- Invited and incorporated feedback and suggestions from library leadership on the shape and direction of our team's mission. Leadership across the Library empowered our team to sandbox and build workflows, services, provide technical resources for managing evaluation and consultation requests, to learn by doing accessibility in projects we were involved in and to conduct evaluation and consultation services for teams across the library.
- Team members met every week to draft vision, mission, and plan and create services

Digital Accessibility Team members



Bridget Burke

Front-End
Developer &
Accessibility
Specialist
(Library IT)



Jon McGlone

Front-End & UI
Designer
(Michigan
Publishing)



Stephanie Rosen

Accessibility
Specialist
(Learning &
Teaching)



Ben Howell

User Experience &
Accessibility
Specialist
(Library IT)



Jon Earley

Front-End
Developer &
Accessibility
Specialist
(Library IT)

Our team

- 5 total members (3 from Library Information Technology), (1 from Publishing) and (1 from Learning and Teaching)
- We developed some specific roles on the team to help with leadership, administration and communication:
 - We designated/volunteered for 2 Co-Chair positions: (Ben and Jon E. and now Ben and Bridget)(Create agenda, Lead meetings, conduct outreach)
 - Stephanie Rosen as Accessibility Specialist for the Library leads communication to leadership and to the Library about events,
 - Bridget Burke (Leads and Maintains our ticketing system for evaluation requests. She ensures that our work is well described, tracked, assessed and completed and that we close the loop with our colleagues using our services)
 - Jon McGlone (Leads accessibility efforts around digital publishing in his department and performs evaluation services and consultations for partners in the Library and from other institutions.

**Mission, expertise,
and services**

Digital Accessibility Team's mission

- Help align individual, team and organizational practices within Library organizational culture, processes and workflows
- Provide expertise on digital accessibility standards (WCAG, 508, ATAG, ARIA, EPUB) and accessible design/development best practices.
- Provide web accessibility evaluation services
- Conduct outreach, training and consultation (office hours, etc.)

- Help align individual, team and organizational practices within Library organizational culture, processes and workflows
- Provide expertise on digital accessibility standards (WCAG, 508, ATAG, ARIA, EPUB) and accessible design/development best practices
- Provide web accessibility evaluations
- Conduct outreach, training, and consultation during office hours

Our services

1. Provide consultation services during office hours or by appointment
2. Web accessibility evaluations (light, full and custom)
3. Provide support/resources for library staff to understand basic accessibility barriers and utilize universal design and digital accessibility best practices within their regular work

In our first year we set up office hours and ways for our Library staff to interact and meet with our team for consultations. We organized workflows and technology (JIRA Service Desk) to intake, carry out and deliver results from web accessibility evaluations.

Explain what's in the Light, full and custom evaluations. (Typical time to complete them, how many team members work on them, how we report it)

- Light evaluation (A start to identify major barriers, not in-depth, under 4 hours to plan/complete evaluation, one or two team member, create and deliver an evaluation report, could be used as a way to evaluate one or more products during procurement process, an existing product or product in development)
- Custom evaluation (4-12 hours to plan/complete evaluation, two team members, create and deliver evaluation report, consult and provide customized evaluations, provide recommendations to a vendor, etc.)
- Full Evaluation (A detailed audit measuring every criteria in WCAG 2.1 and providing a categorized/prioritized list of issues and recommendations, 30-40 hours, 1 person with 1 co-reviewer)

Consultations (office hours are short starts, additional meetings set up to understand the context of digital accessibility, what an evaluation or audit can provide and how to better include web accessibility within design, development, and assessment of digital platforms or content, etc.)

Who needs our services?

- Project managers
- UX and UI designers and front end developers
- Library Administration/Department managers
- Product and service owners
- Program managers
- Human Resources staff
- Public services staff

Who needs our services?

- Library staff/administration licensing large scale platforms (software/electronic resources) for public and/or internal use
- Library staff/administration evaluating individual software for public and/or internal use
- Library staff or student staff creating content via library or 3rd party platforms
- Project teams developing or redesigning web pages, assessing collections, etc.

When are DAT services requested?

1. Procurement of new resources / renewing a contract or license for third party content or software
2. Creation of new web content and documents, products and services
3. Planning or carrying out updates or redesigns related to vendor or library maintained digital products, services or platforms

1. Procurement of new resources / renewing a contract or license for third party content or software
2. Creation of new web content and documents, products and services
3. Planning or carrying out updates or redesigns related to vendor or library maintained products, services or platforms

Reflection on impact

Reflection on our first year

1. Defined and refined our web accessibility evaluation services
 - a. Process/technology for request intake and management
 - b. Designated/empowered team member to manage evaluation requests
 - c. Created protocol for evaluations and template for actionable reports
 - d. Practiced consulting with technical and non-technical staff on next steps
2. Established consistent office hours service
3. Empowered team members with defined roles based on capacity and expertise

Opportunity:

Conduct outreach to key partners in the Library and market our services

Last December, at the end of our team's first year, we had a team reflection meeting where we documented what was working well, what we'd like to do differently and what resources we needed to move forward.

We recognized the work we'd done to set up and define evaluation services.

Growing influence in the Library

Challenge:

How can we connect the value of our digital accessibility expertise, resources and services with key partners in the Library?

Solution:

- Schedule outreach appointments (team meetings, office hours) with key partners from (Human Resources, Deans' Office, campus partners)
- Introduce our mission, accessibility services, and expertise
- Just listen
- Brainstorm opportunities to collaborate and follow up

Challenge:

After we created and refined our web accessibility evaluation services, and met with a handful of interested, proactive Librarians and Library staff during our regular office hours, we realized something. How can we help our Library staff in departments across the library to be more inclusive and accessible if they never know we exist?!

We decided to get more intentional about how we invited Library partners from different divisions and departments in the Library. In the last year we scheduled appointments with 14 key leaders/partners in the Library's Dean's Office to public computing and Information Technology.

We introduced our mission, services and expertise. We listened to our colleagues questions/ideas about how digital accessibility might impact their current workflows. Finally we brainstormed small ways we could work together to plan and work more equitably and inclusively by embedding digital accessibility as core part of budgeting, procurement, design and development processes.

Results of digital accessibility outreach

- Majority of colleagues are culturally aware and interested in accessibility
- Largely unaware of accessibility policies, guidelines
- Unaware that DAT could help them practice digital accessibility more fully in their day to day work
- Opportunity to reframe and embed digital accessibility resources, services and consultation within Library processes
- The better we understand our Library colleagues work the better we understood our team, services and resource needs

What we found:

- Majority of Colleagues are culturally aware and interested in accessibility
- Largely unaware of accessibility policies, guidelines
- Unaware that DAT could help them practice digital accessibility more fully in their work
- Opportunity to reframe and embed digital accessibility resources, services and consultation to improve Library processes
- The better we understand our Library colleagues work the better we understood our team, services and resource needs.

Story

...during a recent outreach meeting with Meghan and Craig



Meghan
Lead Project
Manager



Craig
Assessment
Specialist

A few weeks ago we met with two wonderful Library colleagues during one of our Digital Accessibility Team office hours. (Meghan Musolff leads project management efforts across the Library and Craig Smith leads assessment efforts in the Library. We introduced our mission, our services, we listened to their goals around diversity, equity and inclusion and accessibility and we talked about a few ways we'd like to collaborate with them.

At one point, I asked Meghan, "How can we help you in your work?" She responded, "I don't think anyone has ever asked me that! I'm usually the one that asks that question."

At the end of our meeting Craig asked how he could request a consultation and evaluation of a Library wide survey he was developing. We recently met again and discussed ways to follow web accessibility guidelines in the creation of the survey instrument and the content of questions and answers formats.

A few days later, Meghan referred Library HR to our team for help with a library-wide Individual Annual Planning document (our library's revitalized version of the performance management process) that would be used by over 400 Library employees and managers.

We evaluated the current document and created a more accessible version using web accessibility guidelines. We shared our evaluation and new document version with our HR partners. They were excited about the changes and were happy that the new form

removes technical barriers and ambiguity in the content that would have blocked and challenged managers and employees from tracking and reporting their annual goals.

Next steps

Collaboration with accessibility campus partners

- Pilot Accessibility IT Standard Practice Guide (SPG) with the library
- Proactive approach to accessibility evaluation and compliance
- Handful of departments/projects adopt SPG into workflows and processes
- Learn together with campus partners in Information Technology Services and the Office for Institutional Equity
- Identify needed resources, training, and expertise

Finally, as part of an upcoming release of a campus wide IT Accessibility Standard Practice Guide (SPG), the Digital Accessibility Team is working with our Campus Digital Accessibility Coordinator in the Office for Institutional Equity and Accessibility Analysts, which is located in campus' Information Technology Services, to pilot the adoption of the SPG in several projects and departments in the Library.

The pilot will help our Library's leadership, teams, and individuals better understand how digital accessibility evaluation, policy, and compliance can work together with existing Library workflows for building, procuring, and maintaining Library products, services, collections, and spaces.

We are excited to move forward together with our library and campus colleagues to ensure that our Library experience is diverse, equitable, inclusive, and accessible for all.

Takeaways

Rachel and Ben - 5 minutes

So we've just spent some time talking about how we, at the University of Michigan, saw some challenges and opportunities around coordinating accessibility efforts across campus and in the library. We talked about how our library strategically responded to those opportunities, and the amazing work that our Digital Accessibility Team is doing to transform our culture.

Nurture an inclusive and accessibility first culture

1. Craft and align organization behind a vision and mission to deliver accessible products and services
2. Build product, service design, and development processes and workflows to include and leverage web accessibility guidelines and universal design
3. Conduct regular outreach and training
4. Practice experiential learning — Learn accessibility through practice coupled with training
5. Include people of all abilities in product and service design, development, and assessment

We'd like to leave you with some final thoughts about effective ways to nurture an inclusive and accessible culture in your Library:

1. Craft and align organization behind a vision and mission to deliver accessible products and services
2. Build product, service design, and development processes and workflows to include and leverage web accessibility guidelines and universal design
3. Conduct regular outreach and training
4. Practice experiential learning — Learn accessibility through practice coupled with training
5. Include people of all abilities in product and service design, development, and assessment

Resources



[U-M Library: Digital Accessibility
Team Charge](#)

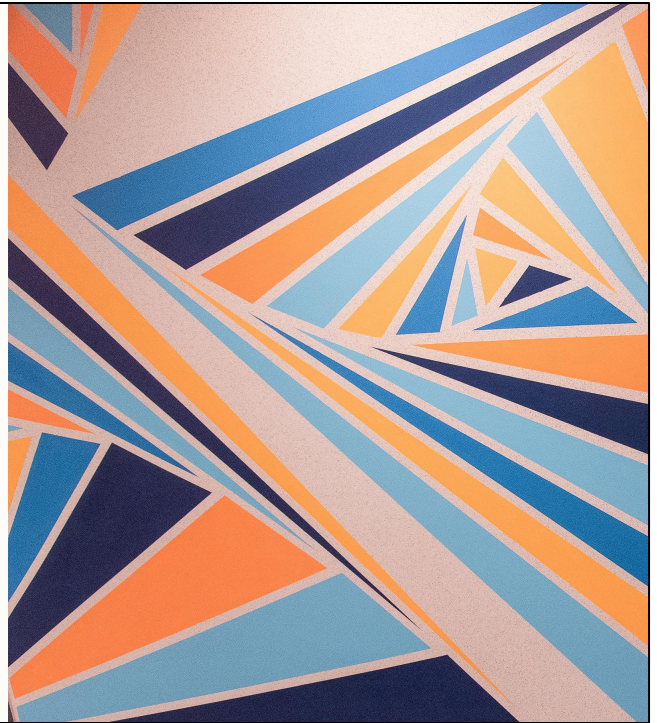
[U-M Library: Digital Accessibility
Evaluation Protocol \(Light\)](#)

Here are 2 resources that you can use to help you as you make plans to transform your organization's culture.

Thank you for being here!

Rachel Vacek
rvacek@umich.edu

Ben Howell
bnhowell@umich.edu



Thank you for being here! We hope this presentation has provided you with some insight into the ways you can work with your organization's colleagues to better understand and respond to the digital accessibility opportunities around you.

We believe that nurturing an inclusive and accessibility first culture will help transform your work as well as the lives of our users.

Here's our contact info. Feel free to reach out to us (and Ben especially!) if you'd like more information.

We should have about 15 minutes for questions. What questions do you have?